

The Steps to Somewhere

For the longest time, Douglas never knew he had a problem. And for an even longer time Douglas never knew what his problem was. He had never fitted in to any group or even to any relationship, but he just concluded, almost unconsciously, that this was due to his early life, and then him not having performed properly, and by not having performed properly he meant that he had not been raised in any environment which catered to his early life being characterized by normal or healthy interpersonal behavior and interactions. No, his earliest years were, simply put, hell for the boy. So, he grew up with no tools or experience in normalcy. Just to clarify a little, Douglas's early life contained too many instances of abandonment; first when his biological mother left him after his birth, and then when first one foster home he was in no longer wanted him, so he was returned. Altogether he was in seven different foster homes by the time he was five. Regular, severe beatings occurred, and eventually by three he was being raped regularly. Douglas hated even thinking about such atrocities, let alone knowing that those atrocities happened to him. Douglas was proud of the fact that he had survived his youth, and by looking at him you would never guess his past. Even by getting to know him you would still never guess the calamity and depravity he suffered. His well-honed survival skills were a gift from God, and the fact he had used them so adroitly at such a young age was another gift from God.

One of his biggest burdens were the secrets that he decided to keep. He never told anyone about the abuse that happened to him. Whether it was the threats of more beatings, or the threats from the perpetrators that he would be killed if he told anyone, he never knew. In a strange way Douglas knew his life was bad but, and as if he had a sixth sense, he knew that by blabbing to anyone his life would get far worse. Even at the very young age he was, he knew the people who were abusing him were dangerous people, and he believed their dire threats. Growing up with such dark secrets that he couldn't reveal burdened him in ways that others never experienced. Douglas had experienced more physical, mental, emotional, and sexual abuse by the time he was five years old than some people experience in their lifetime.

While Douglas was busy adroitly handling his life, he knew something was missing, but, because he was so busy with so much incoming information all the time, he could never figure out what he was missing. The incoming information was first of all the adults he came into contact with, and he needed to find out if they were friends or predators. School took a lot of processing, and school contained not only peer pressure but also academic pressures, and of course there was sports. His peer pressures were mostly contained by Douglas keeping to himself. But Douglas's family was very poor, and judging by the state of the outside of his house with its peeling and faded paint, the brown lawns, and the dismal looking curtains, they were the poorest family in the neighborhood. Douglas wore clothes that would last the longest time, and he wore boots because they too lasted a long time. His boots were always purchased a size bigger than he wore so he would grow into them. His haircuts were done at home by an inexperienced and uncaring person, his step-mother, and it showed. There were nicks and dings, long parts and gouges, and

he knew he looked goofy. The other children made sure Douglas knew he looked goofy too. The teasing was constant, as were the meanness and the cutting remarks, but still every day brought him mornings before school and afternoons after school, which Douglas used to recharge his internal happiness. He would find salamanders on his way to school, and one time he found a bullfrog. One day he even watched a fistfight between two much bigger boys. Douglas was simply astonished by the world around him as long as he wasn't being harmed.

Douglas knew there was a problem with him, with his life, and with everything that was going on around him, but the thoughts were so nebulous and the amount of time he could spend figuring anything out was so small, that he ended up simply doing his very best in school, doing the best he could with his peers and the academic pressure, and of course he tried to do his best in all things that he did, but sometimes he simply didn't know what to do. Douglas was good at sports, and he was good at most anything he devoted his time to learning. His grades were excellent by the eighth grade, and he had seemingly survived the trauma of being abandoned as a newborn, then again and again as an infant. The number of foster homes grew, and more abandonment continued as a toddler, and by three he was being raped repeatedly. He was cast out of one foster home to another, and by school-age he was back with his father and his father's wife. The rapes ceased immediately but Douglas was one very emotionally messed up boy, and he didn't know how to interact with people. As long as people kept their from him, he was fine. But when people got close to him, or when a person tried to help him which necessitated physical closeness, he immediately became confused, and he wanted to get away and be alone. Douglas knew he was safe when he was alone.

Douglas wished he could be a sheep that could blend into a herd of sheep, but of course Douglas could never be that. His clothes were different, his hair was cut different, and really everything about Douglas made him stand out from the herd. His school grades were A's, except for the classes where he didn't like the teachers. And the two reasons he didn't like those teachers was either because they tried to help him, which caused them to get too close physically, or because they acted as teachers who had power over his behavior. At fifteen years old there was no way for Douglas to tell his teachers to leave him alone, and so he was left to act out his wants and needs using mime. Was it realistic for him to believe that somehow the adults in his life would understand his mime? Douglas never had that thought. So many thoughts and desires, hopes and dreams, lead to nowhere in Douglas's mind, and usually he would forget whatever the drama of the day was very quickly. Unless of course his behavior came to the attention of an adult who thought they had authority over him. Attention and detention became two things Douglas tried to avoid. He learned quickly that he despised when one person possessed seemingly unlimited power over him. His first reaction was to rebel. Even people who were sincerely trying to help him he would rebel against. Douglas didn't know why he rebelled. His parents didn't know why he rebelled. Nor did his school or his church know why he rebelled. Douglas didn't even know how much he despised authoritarians in his life. But, whenever he was confronted by one, he rebelled. His rebellion didn't stop even if it cost him something he really wanted. If it cost him, it cost him, and that was fine.

Douglas innately knew something was missing from his life, but he didn't know what it was. Now out of high school, and out of the sphere of influence of parental figures and educational figures, Douglas was free to investigate on his own. Douglas knew he had a problem, and he began searching for an answer. As Douglas investigated in his wonderful new environment, he found an eclectic group of people who were outside the mainstream, and who advanced alternative approaches to spirituality, right living, and health. He learned beliefs such as reincarnation, holism, pantheism, and occultism. Douglas found himself in a world of meaning finally, though he was still not conscious of that fact. He read wonderful poetry, he read the writings of learned writers, and he was introduced to intellectuals who wrote and talked about ideas he had never thought about himself. Douglas began asking himself who he was, and he began asking himself why was he here?

Douglas was in a vast movement of New Age people. He began smoking marijuana. He listened to the best music he had ever heard, and learned things he had never known existed. His life finally had meaning, and yet Douglas still wasn't conscious that his life had meaning.

A warrant for arrest was issued and Douglas was terrified. His refusal to go to a war he didn't want to go to seemed like a perfectly good reason not to have to go. But the autocrats disagreed, and finally Douglas was forced to flee before being arrested. Douglas's life became a life of seeking pleasure wherever he could find it. He travelled to some of the finest places on earth, he loved the most beautiful women he could find, he smoked the finest hashish in the world, and he drank the finest alcohol produced in the countries he travelled through. Pleasure became his distraction from finding a deeper sense of meaning in his life. And just as he had been eager and greedy to learn the information that finding a deeper sense of meaning had provided him, and which infused his life with a deep sense of meaning, so too now did he literally attack this new phase in his life. Douglas forgot most of the education he had recently acquired. He forgot about existentialism, he forgot about meditation, he forgot about writing, and yet he noticed windows in his life where he saw those things again, and a part of him would pine for his lost life, but the reality of prison time greatly outweighed any thoughts of him returning.

Occasionally Douglas would read. At times he wouldn't read at all and at other times he became a voracious reader. He read American, French, and English writers. Douglas loved reading novels that told stories that contained meaning. For Douglas it was the same as watching movies. If there was no meaning, he would stop reading the novel or he would stop watching the movie. Douglas got to a point where if the thing he was doing had no meaning he simply stopped doing it. Again, Douglas was not consciously aware of why he was doing what he was doing, but he was very consistent with what he did and how he responded. It was as if parts of life were simply boring for Douglas. The mundane concerns of daily life held absolutely no place in Douglas's life. Once he had achieved a goal, he wanted to do something different, something new, and something challenging for him.

Douglas's life continued at a crazy speed and always included Douglas making singular decisions to simply leave a place or people or both, on a whim. Nothing could hold his attention for very long and no one could make him give up his search for his next pleasure. Douglas was very happy and Douglas was very optimistic about his life. Douglas was nearing thirty years old; he was very handsome, very strong, and he was experienced at handling the experiences of pleasure.

Finally, the warrant for his arrest was lifted and he was free from the bonds that had kept him away for so many years. Douglas, for really no other reason than he could, decided to return to where he had lived a decade and a half before. Douglas found that almost everything had changed. Nearly all the people he had known had opted out of a life of rebelling for social change, and of trying to reign in the social, political, educational and military norms that they had encountered as they grew up, and, even worse, they had joined the very forces they had initially been so outraged by. Gone were the people he knew who had demonstrated along with him for equality, for an end to war, for free speech, and for so many other issues. The tract homes they had lived in as children they now lived as adults. Some lived in very fine homes in the hills outside and away from the city, and many had settled for their childhood sweetheart. They had two to four children, two cars, and jobs they went to every Monday through Friday. They talked about their retirement plans thirty plus years away, and Douglas listened patiently. He was never rude, mean, or condescending, and he also never showed contempt.

Douglas would sometimes sit quietly on a dock by the bay, and he would listen to the fog horns blowing. Other times he would hitch hike out to the ocean, and watch waves coming into shore. He was intrigued by the waves and how, after they crashed, they immediately blended back into the water around them. First, the curling waves existed as distinct entities, and then they did not.

His impulsive behavior to distract himself with pleasure began giving way to him finding, once again, a sense of meaning to his life. Douglas began to realize that his life was for him alone to live. His life had always seemed ahead of him, and he was always trying to fix this or survive that, or he was always trying to belong here or there, or he wanted to be liked and accepted. But those things that he so wanted would always become valueless and would soon become boring, because they didn't reach into his depths. Relationships had been passionate and electric but soon both of those elements faded. Towns, islands, and countries he visited were beautiful and enchanting, but soon reality set in and they too lost their luster.

Douglas's need for a deeper meaning cost him much. His jobs didn't give him a deeper meaning so he would quit. And it is hard to get financially ahead in a society that puts emphasis on the monetary side of life when one is quitting jobs regularly. Douglas's marriages ended. His friendships ended because, or so it seemed to Douglas, there was nothing new happening in his friendships. His friends could literally do what Douglas could not do: they could do the same things over and over and over again, without needing to quit out of boredom. Watching his friends do the same things over and over and over again bored Douglas so much he simply stopped visiting them.

Douglas drifted inside his mind, and he drifted amidst the people he met. He was very gregarious as he tried to find people who were like those he had known all those decades before. For Douglas being gregarious was a way to pierce the façade of the people he met, and as he did so he learned their true core beliefs, and depending on what he learned he would stay longer or he would leave. For Douglas usually it was the latter.

Then one day Douglas sat down, and he started writing. He wrote a story about a young man who felt he needed to choose between being a creative human being, a writer, who could travel and experience everything life had to offer, or he had to choose to throw out an anchor and stay somewhere, to work, to contribute in a meaningful way, even though the latter choice would kill his creativity. Society seemed to express to him that his contribution to society was best served by the latter choice. Perhaps he felt the burden of society weighing on his choice because he had yet to have any success in the artistic world which he so loved.

Finally, Douglas made a choice, and he said goodbye to the society and to the people that he had tried so hard to be accepted by but who had never accepted him as he was. His choice was for him to finally go his own way. And so, he did that. He moved to a place where he knew no one and no one knew him. He didn't go there to make enemies but sometimes in small towns and villages people simply dislike other people because they are strangers. Gradually Douglas felt an edgy acceptance from some, and this edgy acceptance slowly grew to actual friendships. Douglas didn't encourage friendships and for some people he discouraged them from visiting him. After several years this new life became a life in which his creativity thrived. He seemed to be in front of his life now, and he was pulling all the pieces together to make the life he wanted. He lived through winters that would have overwhelmed or intimidated him just a few years before because he was able to learn quickly and adroitly. And he didn't find his life living in the mountains particularly hard. In fact, he found he was well equipped to handle the physicality of this new home, whereas before he was ill equipped to handle the starvation and deprivation that he felt his soul was experiencing.

Douglas had moved to a place where people left him alone if he wanted to be left alone; and yes Douglas, for the most part, wanted to be left alone. It was the same reason they lived in this place too. By continuing to be socially gregarious Douglas found out he had things in common with these people, and that they had things in common with him. Of course, he couldn't comprehend how they never got bored with going to work to the same job for forty or more years, or being married for forty years or more to the same person, nor did he ever get used to their routines that they continued day in and day out for decades. He never got used to nor did he ever understand why they never got bored. No, Douglas got bored watching movies, and he rarely watched a movie until it ended. Television bored him, and a lot of life bored him. But what Douglas had finally found was that he did not bore himself. He lived with himself and by himself for decades, sometimes a girlfriend would hang out with him, but the challenge of finding his depth was his goal. The challenge of the ever-changing answers to the questions of who am I? and why am I here? continually echoed within his being. It was as if each time he asked those questions, and then answered those two questions, he built

another step down into the depths to wherever he was going. Douglas knew no fear in the realm of the world he had so painstakingly created. What he did know was that he finally belonged to someone who loved him, cared about him, and most importantly someone he could trust completely: himself. He also knew that where he was going was exactly where he wanted to go.

The End.

Written by Peter Skeels © May 23rd, 2022